Offered 'Deal' by Friend Of Petre's, Ward Says

District attorney candidate Charles Ray Ward today charged a representative of mayoral candidate John J. Petre offered him Petre's endorsement in exchange for either a reciprocal endorsement or a cash contribution to Petre's campaign.

Petre, who yesterday endorsed DA candidate Harry Connick, heatedly denied Ward's charge, calling it "a malicious distortion." Petre said Ward's candidacy "is in an untenable position" and added he never considered "for even a minute" endorsing Ward.

WARD, IN A press conference, said he was called Friday by John Cummings, an attorney who Ward described as Petre's campaign manager. Ward said Cummings made the offer of an endorsement in exchange for a reciprocal endorsement or a contribution "of an amount less than $10,000."

Petre said Cummings is not his campaign manager but has helped in the campaign. Petre, a city councilman-at-large, said Cummings was never consulted in the matter of endorsements and had no voice in Petre's decision to endorse Connick.

PETRE SAID he felt when Ward resigned recently as first assistant district attorney to run against incumbent Jim Garrison "it was a despicable act by someone who had been an integral part of the DA's office now running against his former boss."

Cummings, contacted for a statement, said he did call Ward last Friday but did so without Petre's knowledge or permission. He said Ward is a friend of his and he hoped Ward would call Petre in an effort to get Petre's endorsement.

"I NEVER discussed funds with Mr. Ward," said Cummings. "I am not a fund raiser. I acted because I intended to vote for Mr. Ward and admire him."

In his statement, Ward said: "Naturally, I would expect both Mr. Connick and Mr. Petre to deny a deal was made. But I don't believe either of them are going to fool the people of New Orleans.

"MR. PETRE is too good and too smart a politician not to have gotten something in return for his endorsement of Harry Connick."

In his denial, Petre said Connick is free to get endorsements from any other mayoral candidates who might choose to endorse him.

Ward said he will not accept endorsements from any mayoral candidates because it would impair his independence.